



news from the

Department of Community and Human Services

alexandria community services board



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Team Brings Services to Shelters

In her work as Homeless Services Coordinator, therapist Michelle Albert often encounters persons in need of mental health services. The challenge has been maneuvering around the obstacles to providing that assistance.

“As I was visiting the shelters, I was finding so many people who had dropped out of [MH] services,” says Albert. “They were having a difficult time getting back in because of outstanding balances.”

“Finance frustrates me,” Albert adds. “I could only imagine how it must frustrate folks who are homeless and with serious mental illness. So I went to Tracey Reed (an account clerk in Reimbursement) and she suggested that we just go to them.”

And so, BART was born. BART, the acronym for Barriers to Access Removal Team, consists of Albert, Reed and reimbursement manager Gary Rossi. Each week they travel to the shelters in Alexandria bringing their laptops and expertise.

Although the department charges consumers for services, the fees are, on average, low and are levied on a sliding scale based on the client’s ability to pay. Most consumers, especially those insured by Medicare or Medicaid, pay nothing. However, everyone is required to update their maximum ability to pay (MAP) information annually. When consumers fail to provide documentation because they forget their appointments or can’t find proper paperwork, they are charged full price for services. Hence, they run up an outstanding balance and they don’t know where it comes from.

The account balance increases every time a consumer comes in contact with a case manager or therapist or psychiatrist. Staff document the time spent with the consumer and that information is fed into the billing system. When the system sees no MAP information, it charges full fee.

Before BART, the process for getting mental health services was challenging. As Albert explains, “The shelter resident gets a referral from either the shelter case manager or mental health outreach therapist. The resident then makes an intake

appointment at the mental health office. At that meeting, a staff person from Intake Services meets with the resident and completes an Initial Contact Form. That information is put into the computer and the resident’s name is put on a wait list for a clinical intake. Because there is a back-log, he is told he will be called for his next intake appointment.

“When he is called for that appointment, he is told to bring documentation of his income. Hopefully he remembers. He meets with a finance person who does the administrative intake, then they do the math. If he has an outstanding balance, he is told he must meet with the reimbursement staff, give them the finance paperwork and they will determine what to do with his outstanding balance. After that session, he returns to finance staff who will straighten out the administrative piece and then he can move on to the clinical piece. He then goes for a clinical intake which may not be done the same day.”

Multiple appointments can be challenging for most people, but for those who are penniless, who have no mode of transportation other than buses, who are required by the shelters to look for employment every day, these appointments can become barriers that prevent the consumer from following through with treatment.

“By going to the shelters, says Reed, “we’re streamlining the process. Michelle does the therapy side and we do the financial side.”

The team meets with shelter residents and their case managers, explains services, answers questions, gets a release of information, does the initial contact form and puts the person on the wait list for an

intake. By bringing the services to the consumers, there’s no frustration of multiple visits to the office. If the consumer has an outstanding balance, he is asked to pay 25 percent and a monthly payment plan can be created and everyone involved with the consumer stays in the loop.

The new process, in place since April 2011, has helped to reduce balances and clean up accounts while also improving relationships with shelter staff and residents. “This is the best thing going,” says Reed.



Michelle Albert, left, Tracey Reed and Gary Rossi.

Check out the new Department of Community & Human Services website at:
alexandriava.gov/dchs

Keep it 360 Launch Event a Success

The Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP) and Teens Talk launched a new multi-media marketing campaign called Keep it 360 at a post-football game party at T.C. Williams High School. More than 300 youth and community supporters braved the rain to take part in the fun, enjoy music and food, and hear about the new initiative.

Teens Talk is a group of four T.C. Williams students who volunteered their time and energy to create an outreach campaign for ACAP. They worked with marketing experts to design a logo, write a blog, create key messages and plan the launch event.

Mayor William D. Euille and Congressman Jim Moran attended the event to voice their support of the project and encourage young people to think about the ramifications of teen pregnancy.

Keep it 360 is about keeping it real all the way around. It's a campaign to foster real, open and honest conversations about sex and teen pregnancy among teens, adults and the community. Guilt, misinformation and taboos make up many of today's conversations. Teens Talk wants to change the status quo by changing the content and the tone of these conversations.



Becky Griesse, left, Coordinator, Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy, and Deborah Warren, Director, Center for Children and Families, at the Keep It 360 launch party.

Alexandria's teen pregnancy rate is 47.3 per 1,000 females aged 10-19, almost double the state rate and triple the Northern Virginia rate. Over the past 10 years, Alexandria has seen a 30 percent decrease in teen pregnancy.

To find out more about the campaign, visit KeepIt360.org or follow the Teens Talk blog at blog.KeepIt360.org.

Domestic Violence Victims Honored at Vigil

The Alexandria Domestic Violence Intervention Project held a number of events throughout the City in October in observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Despite inclement weather, a group of persons, including Mayor William D. Euille, crowded under the roof of the stage on Market Square to light candles in a silent vigil to remember and honor all those who have died or are still suffering due to actions of domestic violence.

The Silent Witness Project, which began in Minnesota in 1990 and expanded nearly nationwide, calls attention to domestic violence with life-size red silhouettes, each bearing the name of a woman whose life was brutally cut short due to violence. Alexandria displayed silhouettes of local domestic violence victims.

In addition, the Domestic Violence Project collaborated with Inova Alexandria Hospital for the 7th Annual "Health Cares About Domestic Violence Day" where hospital personnel and visitors can learn what they can do to detect domestic violence and how to respond to and assist victims.

The focus of this year's event was the "journey of the purple

folder," which is given to victims when they go to Alexandria Hospital for medical care. The journey illustrates how victims are connected with different agencies throughout the City.

This event was designed to educate members of the health care community about the critical importance of assessing for domestic violence as well as showing the long-term health implications of abuse and lifetime exposure to violence. Various agencies had information tables with resources to assist the medical personnel in addressing domestic abuse.

Medical studies link long-term effects of domestic violence and abuse with a myriad of health problems including smoking, diabetes, obesity, eating disorders and substance abuse. However, while doctors and nurses routinely screen for high blood pressure and high cholesterol, too few screen for domestic violence.

The month of activities included fund-raisers, information distribution, and a training for City employees regarding when domestic violence comes to work. The observance culminated with an appreciation breakfast for supporters.

For further information about DCHS's Domestic Violence program, visit alexandriava.gov/dchs, and see the Center for Children and Families.



S. Randolph Sengel, Commonwealth's Attorney, addresses the group at the Silent Vigil and a candle illuminates the name of a recent victim.



Persons in Recovery Display Talent at Local Showcase

The Alexandria community celebrated those in recovery at the Alcohol and Drug Recovery Talent Showcase at a packed Metro Stage. Performers included singers, dancers, violinists and even a teen mini-orchestra. The audience sang along to “Lean on Me,” and engaged in impromptu dancing when several members danced to bongo drums on the stage.

The Showcase was offered free to the community in recognition of National Recovery Month, a time to promote the societal benefits of treatment for substance use and mental health disorders, celebrate people in recovery, applaud the contributions of treatment providers and promote the possibility

of recovery in all forms. The event was sponsored by the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria, Alexandria’s Mental Health HOPE Campaign, Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center and the Community Services Board.



Opioid Treatment Program Featured in SAMHSA Video

The Alexandria Opioid Treatment Program is featured in two recently released videos about best practices for medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction. Opioid treatment helps adults stop using narcotics by prescribing and monitoring methadone, a medication that does not produce a “high” and minimizes the discomfort of withdrawal. Clients participate in counseling and abstain from illegal drugs and alcohol while in the program.

The videos, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), inform providers and clients how most effectively to use methadone and suboxone in treatment. These informative videos also help to reduce the stigma often associated with opioid replacement therapy and remind viewers that methadone treatment is the gold standard for treating opioid addiction.

The clinic was one of only five chosen for this project out of the 1,300 programs in the nation. The videographers spent more than a day at the clinic on Mill Road last fall, interviewing and filming patients and staff. Under the medical supervision of Dr. Kurt Brandt, the Alexandria clinic has achieved CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitative Facilities) accreditation repeatedly since 2002 and has been identified as “exemplary” for its range of clinical programming that is designed to meet the needs of clients. Dr. Brandt noted that “the reason our treatment program works is because the medical, nursing and clinical staff work as a team. The medication is only the first step because it allows the patient to become available for the therapy.”

For more information or to view a copy of the video, contact Susan Tatum, MH Team Supervisor, Substance Abuse Outpatient Program at 703.746.3648 or susan.tatum@alexandriava.gov.



Lynn Smith (nursing supervisor), Doyle Goode (OTP client) and Dr. Kurt Brandt (medical director).



Department of Community & Human Services
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Resource Guides Available for Youth & Families and Older Alexandrians

Two resource guides are available online and in PDF from the Department of Community and Human Services.

A Resource Guide for Alexandria's Children, Youth & Families, compiled by the Office of Youth Services, is an inventory of programs and services for youth provided by City agencies, non-profit and community organizations. The Guide can be used by parents and youth to locate educational, health, social service and leisure-time opportunities, and by youth service professionals to assist families with referrals to needed supports. Resources for youth of all ages, prenatal to age 21, and their families are included.

To make comments or suggestions for story ideas, contact Jennifer Cohen at 703.746.3484 or jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov. Contributors: Jan Schrader, Noraine Buttar, Susan Tatum, Becky Griesse and Debra Evans.

Access the City of Alexandria's pages on Twitter and Facebook. Connect today at [alexandriava.gov/Twitter](https://twitter.com/alexandriava) and [alexandriava.gov/Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/alexandriava) to receive up-to-the minute information about City news, events, initiatives and more.

To view or download a copy, go to alexandriava.gov/dchs and see Communications. For additional information, contact Jacqueline Coachman at 703.746.5969 or at jacqueline.coachman@alexandriava.gov.

Services for Older Alexandrians, a guide created by the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), provides information and resources for older Alexandrians and adults with disabilities to help them find the information and services they need to lead healthy and independent lives as they grow older. To view or download a copy go to alexandriava.gov/Aging.

The Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services is comprised of programs from three formerly separate departments: The Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse; Human Services and the Office on Women. While the Alexandria Community Services Board (CSB) will continue oversight of mental health, intellectual disability and substance abuse programs, the CSB newsletter will now feature programs from across the new department.

To receive this newsletter by email, send a request to jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov.

